

7582³

THE

ST. JAMES'S MAGAZINE

CONDUCTED BY

MRS. S. C. HALL.

AUGUST TO NOVEMBER.

VOL. II.

LONDON :

PUBLISHED FOR THE PROPRIETOR BY

W. KENT AND Co., PATERNOSTER ROW.

NEW YORK: WILLMER AND ROGERS.

MDCCCLXI.

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ISABELL CARR.

A SCOTTISH STORY IN TWO PARTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MARGARET MAITLAND," &c. &c.

PART I.—CHAP. I.

"I'm glad to see you hame," said the old man.

"And I'm glad to win hame, faither," said Bell.

Such was the sober expression of feeling which passed between the father and daughter. The girl's colour was high, and her eyes full of tears; and the old man, while he spoke, did not venture to look at her, but fumbled about his snuff-box, and was evidently relieved when that salutation, slight as it was, was over. They had shaken hands with each other when Bell came: now everything went on as if they had parted yesterday, though the young woman had been away from home for two years.

And home had changed in that time. The mother, the sun of the domestic place, was gone; gone—buried a year ago in the hereditary churchyard five miles off with all her kindred; yet she stood there between them, hushing them to silence, making words impossible. Bell, you may suppose, would have spoken and wept, and poured out her heart, had it been possible; but the old man durst not trust himself to say words which might let loose that long-retained voiceless sorrow. What could words have done to it? Deeper than language was that mute recognition of their loss. She was gone! There was nobody to ask the anxious, oft-repeated questions—nobody to give ear to all the interrupted answers—nobody to speak the welcome, or surround the stranger with all that joyful surprise and curiosity, and eagerness, which is the soul of a return home. What is home when the mother is gone? Bell was glad to take her box up into her attic-room, and cry over it in a violent access of grief and disappointment. She knew it, but she did not know it, before; for it is hard to believe in death at a distance, and almost impossible to think that, though we know they are dead, they are no longer *there*.

Poor Bell had found it out—the word had attained its real translation; her mother was not anywhere to be found on that earth, and her father, whom her heart had imagined changed under the subliming touch of grief, was not changed, but the same. His loss had not made both father and mother of him. He was just as he had been when Bell went to service, more to relieve herself from his strict and critical rule than for any other motive. She sighed to herself, after she was done crying, and went slowly down the narrow staircase. The house was a homely little poor farmhouse, such as are still to be met with in the pastoral wilds of Dumfriesshire—scarcely deserving the name of a farm. A few acres of "arable" land and a hillside for "the beasts" was the extent of its domain; and a labourer and his wife, who lived in a thatched cottage near and were of Andrew Carr's kindred, were all the adherents of the house. Their eldest son

herded the sheep, their small fry of children weeded the scanty turnips and potatoes, and lived in wild primitive liberty between the cottage and the hill. Such were all the human settlers at Whinnyrig. The farmhouse was only thatched, like its little dependency, but had an attic storey, with windows rising out of its thatched roof, and a kitchen big enough to have taken in the entire cottage; a rude, undecorated place—not a flower about it on one side or the other, though the cabbages were not contemptible. Neglected, dreary, half-savage, it lay in the evening light, speaking with a certain stern reticence, like that of its master, to the heart of the motherless young woman. Andrew Carr himself had been heard to acknowledge, that “A’ things had gaen wrang since the wife was away.” Bell’s accustomed eyes saw the difference with even stronger perception than her father’s; and it was to supply that vacant place that she had come home.

She went and sat down beside the old man in the great earthen-floored kitchen. Though it was summer, the fire was glowing red as turf-fires do burn; filling the place with aromatic odours. The father sat close by in the high-backed wooden chair rudely cushioned, and covered with checked blue and white linen. He sat within the glow, not much enlightened by it, twisting his thumbs and gazing into the fire. Bell sat down too, at a distance from him, with her hands crossed on her lap, in punctilious observance of the old-fashioned notion, that, “coming off a journey,” it was a necessary homage to propriety to do nothing. It was getting dark; the horse and the cows were “suppered,” and all was quiet about Whinnyrig; but Bell, who was near the window, could see those long lucid stretches of evening sky, the breaks of primrose light, the green-blue wistful horizon, and latitudes of cloud. Such stillness! You could hear the breathing of these two in their hushed house. It was quite necessary to break this hush by some attempt at conversation. But what was poor Bell to talk of? When she essayed to speak, the *hysterica passio* climbed into her throat.

“Have ye had ony trouble wi’ the beasts the year, faither?” at last faltered Bell. It was the subject most congenial to that locality; and Bell saw no absurdity in the contrast between her question and her thoughts.

“There never was a year but there was fash with the beasts,” said the old man; “and this aboon a’, as was to be expected, I a’ but lost my best cow.”

“That’s Lillie,” said Bell, with a little eagerness. “Bonnie beast! she sall aye be milkit with my ain hand while I’m at hame.”

“Whisht with your haivers! Lillie’s sell’t!” said her father, with some irritation.

“Sell’t!” echoed Bell. The tears came fairly rushing to her eyes in the dark. She turned her head away from the chimney-corner, and looked straight out of the window into the wistful sky. Her heart filled: it was

all her self-command could do to keep down a fit of tears; but she regained her self-possession at last.

"You didna tell me when you wrote," she said, apologetically.

"And if I had, what wad hae been the guid?" said Andrew Carr. "It's no in my way writing letters. I wrote to you when—when it happened; and I wrote you afore the term to come hame; and what could be expected from me mair?"

Another long silence fell upon the father and daughter. Bell, with her hands in her lap, in that unusual solemn Sabbath-day idleness, looked away into the wistful summer evening sky, and watched it change and darken without perceiving what it was she saw. Her father sat looking down into the red glow of the peat fire. Their silence was more touching than any lamentations. They had no heart to speak to each other. The link between them, without that mother whose presence had put a certain amount of inevitable warmth into it, was not much more than an arbitrary bond; for the old farmer of Whinnyrig had never either interested himself in his daughter, nor cared to recognize the wonderful difference between life as it appeared to her and life as he knew it. So there was a dead wall between them when no living heart was there to bring them together. Poor Bell sat tearless, trying vainly to think what she could say—making plans within her ardent youthful mind how she would soften and subdue him by her tenderness, and impatient that she could not begin this moment—but was, like himself, voiceless and spell-bound. She could not have told any one how long this silence lasted; but it was only when in the darkness she saw a figure approaching the house that Bell sprang to her feet, with an impatience which could not be longer restrained. She knew the very shape and gait of that figure, as it came slowly through the twilight—knew it by that sharp-sightedness of dislike and repugnance which is as undeceivable as love. She made haste to light the little oil-lamp which stood high up on the mantel-shelf, and threw a dim, smoky light from that elevation upon the homely apartment. She even made an unnecessary noise and bustle as she did so, as if to draw her father's attention. Her own frame was tingling with sudden vexation and impatience, and her heart within her demanding utterance. But Andrew Carr took no notice: he did not even raise his head when she bustled about the hearth and stretched up to place the lamp in its usual position. He shifted his chair a little, to give her room, without saying a word. Bell's patience was almost exhausted.

"There's James Lowther coming up the brae," she said at last, in a restrained voice.

"Ay?" said the old man, without surprise.

"You're aye friends yet, I suppose?" said Bell.

"Ou, ay—aye friends," said her father, in the same indifferent tone.

Bell was beside herself: her hand trembled, as she fastened the lamp. The irritation of grief and disappointment, and solitude, seized upon her.

"Eh me! and it was for this I left my guid place?" she said to herself under her breath, as she put fresh peats on the fire.

"What are ye saying, Bell?" asked Andrew Carr.

"I'm saying nae doubt he's a married man and doing weel, that ye're aye friends with him, faither," said Bell.

"He's just as muckle marriet as ye are," cried the old man; "and if ye're no ceevil to the decent lad, ye'll get little comfort here. She said it hersel' before she was ta'en, and I'll hae naebody illused in my house."

Bell's pent-up feelings relieved themselves in a long, heavy, impatient sigh: she saw in a moment the whole course that lay before her—the domestic persecution, the loathed love, all those assaults of rustic courtship which *from the wrong person* are hard inflictions even to a country beauty. She went hastily to the great *aumrie* at one end of the kitchen, and took from a corner a large bundle of stockings put there to be mended. It was not very dainty work; but Bell was only a country girl, and had no pretensions to be a young lady. She took her seat near the fire, within reach of the light, and drew one of the stockings over her arm to darn it. She was seated thus, her face bent over her work, when the unwelcome visitor entered.

His personal appearance did not explain the secret of his bad reception. He was well-enough looking, a brown-haired, ruddy, stalwart man of Annandale, lifting his feet high as he walked, as if he felt himself still among the heather; and not without a gleam of real eagerness and lover-like anxiety in his sunburnt face. He looked wistfully in at the door, and lingered for the invitation, "Come in bye! Jamie, come in bye!" which after all only came from the gruff voice of Andrew Carr; and, when he had obeyed, removed his cap and scratched his head, and looked at Bell, longing to speak. Bell took no notice of his bashful looks; she gave him a little dry nod without turning her eyes towards him, and with great devotion went on with her stocking. The embarrassing silence was only broken by the old man, who after a while began the ordinary topics of rural conversation: what were the prospects of the hay; how the turnips were looking; and whether any disease had yet been heard of among the potatoes. Andrew Carr spoke with great deliberation, and required little answer; Bell darned rapidly, without ever raising her head; and James Lowther sat by, saying little, uneasy under the full glow of the fire. Behind the group the evening sky was still darkening through the uncurtained windows, and opening out a streak of wistful light in the blue perspective. It was a very still, placid, homely scene; but, had these human creatures been visible to the eye in the real sentiments which possessed them, how speedily would the group have risen into the world of passion. That old man, slowly droning there about his fields, was as sternly determined to bend his daughter's will to his own as if he had been a powerful despot, and she a rebellious kingdom: behind the rustic lover's embarrassed looks, fierce love and jealousy were hidden: while Bell, all innocent in her domestic occupation, tingled to her very finger-

points with such excitement, irritation, and obstinate resolve, such restrained indignation and grief, as might have made a passionate heroine of the humble young woman. But, to see their homely ways and words, who could have imagined the little drama secretly going on under this homely roof?

"There's no mony would take to their wark so industrious the very night they came hame," said Lowther, at last—speaking at, as he dared not directly address, the lady of his love.

"Ou, ay—Bell's grand at her wark; she'll make a guid wife when her time comes," said Andrew Carr.

"And that'll never come," exclaimed Bell, with sudden bitterness, surprised out of her self-control.

"The lasses aye say sae," said James Lowther; "but it's weel they're no sae ill as their word, or what would become of us a'? They say, when ane's mair positive than anither, that's a guid sign."

Bell did not condescend to answer; but she raised her head, and gave her unlucky admirer a look which made him pause in sudden discomfiture. For she was Andrew Carr's daughter, though she was not like him. She was good and honest, but not meek, by nature. Did they think to overcome her by such poor artifices? A thousand times, no!

"Broomlees maun be pleasant the noo," said the old man; "it's a bonnie bit. I mind upon't in your grandfather's time, Jamie. You and yours have been lang on that land."

"Far langer than the laird," said James, with a laugh. "The Ha' house has changed hands twice since Broomlees was in my name. But there's great need of a woman-body about the place. It's no what it was when you kent it first, nor what we'll have it again, in time, if I get my will."

"Ay, ay; I dare to say ye'll do weel, if ye get a guid wife," said Andrew Carr.

Bell listened to this conversation with a perfect fever in her veins. Knowing what they meant, and knowing how well they knew certain past events which were fresh in her memory, it was intolerable to the high-spirited girl to hear herself so spoken at. But a certain natural sense of dignity acted as a curb upon her, and restrained her tongue.

"I'm thinking ye'll be glad to be in your ain house," said the adventurous suitor, after another pause; "a strange house can never be like ane's ain place, though it may be grander; and to you, that might be your ain mistress, not to say have servants at your ca'——"

"That's impossible!" cried Bell; "I dinna ca' Marget Brown a servant, nor never will. Her man's our second cousin, as everybody kens."

"But weel ye ken I wasna meaning Marget Brown," said the emboldened lover.

"I ken nothing about what ye mean," cried Bell, rising up with angry haste, "nor I care nothing, that's mair; but ye might have had the

sense to let a poor lass alane the first night she's come hame, and her mither away. If ye had held your peace and respected a person, I might have forgiven ye, Jamie Lowther. But eh, man, ye make me mind; ye bring it a' back to me as clear as yesterday. I wouldna say there was anither man in Annandale but would have had the sense to leave the poor auld man and me to ourselves the first night, kenning a' the changes that hae been in this house since I gaed away."

When she had uttered this indignant speech, Bell dropped on her chair again for a moment, and wept some hot, angry tears; then rising, wiped them indignantly away with her apron, took a candlestick from the shelf, lighted the candle at the fire, and went away with hasty, excited steps, holding her head high, and looking at nobody. Her admirer sat and stared discomfited. Her father said nothing. They kept silent when they were left alone till Bell's steps, echoing her anger, had sounded up the wooden, resounding stair, and were lost in the stillness of her own room. Then at last the old man spoke—

"Ye'll take nae notice, Jamie?" said the farmer of Whinnyrig.

"*No the noo*," said Lowther, vindictively; then, changing his tone, "I'm meaning the women maun hae their spite out," he added. "No, I'll never heed."

"I'm nae sae sure ye ken the crater after a'," said Andrew Carr, with a movement of compunction. "She's like the wife in outward appearance, but she's a rael Carr in her spirit. If it was for her advantage to have her ain way—but, it canna be that—it canna be that! Do you ever hear onything o' yon ne'er-do-weel, now?"

"It's no likely," said Lowther, with a little contempt; "if he's living he's at the other end o' the world, and I canna just say I'm so great in his favour as to make him write letters to me."

"Aweel, weel; time tries a'; but I'll no keep you ony later the night, Jamie, my man," said Bell's father. "Come back soon, but no ower-soon, and let bygones be bygones; it'll a' come about in time, if ye have but patience a bit."

"Patience!" echoed Lowther to himself, as he stood on the broken moorland ground below, and looked back at the thatched house of Whinnyrig and the light which streamed from the attic window; "aye, patience! But if I aince hae ye, I'll mak ye pay for this, ye witch," he muttered, shaking his fist at the window,—and with this virtuous sentiment strode slowly home from his lover's journey, leaving the father and daughter still further apart than when he came.

CHAPTER II.

THE light shone faintly out of that attic window long after all the neighbourhood was hushed to sleep. The little room inside had few attractions, and little to distinguish it as a maiden's bower. The sloping roof, the bare walls, the uncarpeted floor, and Bell's great box standing under the

window, were unlovely surroundings. But the farmer's daughter of Whinnyrig was not fastidious nor fanciful. She sat at the little table with her Bible open before her, vainly trying to fix her thoughts to what she had been reading, while, instead of the sacred words, a phantasmagoria of past scenes kept gliding before her eyes, and drew her mind astray. She clasped her hard but comely hands over her forehead, and shut out the light from her eyes, suffering those visions which would not be forbidden—homely pictures, no way sublimated out of that homely scene, yet full of the deepest primitive emotion. She saw herself come into that same apartment all dewy-eyed and blushing, half afraid of her own beauty and happiness, the beaming face that caught her eye in the little glass; and following her came the mother, quick to mark that crisis, to hear the half-told tale, and shelter the girl from her own secret, shamefaced terror. Oh, hour of tenderest gladness! almost sweeter than the troth-plight which preceded it. But darker were the scenes that followed. She saw the doubtful household looks, the mother's hasty glance in at her chamber-door, not waiting except to say good night, afraid of conference. Then the tender, troubled, suggestive speeches, the hints about sailors and their temptations, the father's angry preference of "a decent lad at hame," all the slowly accumulating distrust, dislike, and doubt which rose like a mist round the figure of her sailor-lover—then, unaware of his secret enemies, far off at sea. Then, when the clouds had gathered to their darkest, that storm that at last had violently rent the two asunder. But the sobs broke poor Bell's heart as she remembered herself fallen upon that bed in her despair, and her mother silent, thinking nothing was to be said, stroking the poor cheek from which that tempest had taken all the youthful colour. "Willie thankless! Willie a traitor! Tell me I'm dead, and I'll believe you sooner," sobbed out Bell, repeating in imagination her own very words, and thinking she felt her mother's hand, hopeless of all other comfort, stroking with a pathetic, silent caress her eighteen-year-old colourless cheek.

That was four long years ago. It was James Lowther, of Broomlees, that had put that stigma on his sailor cousin. He said the boy had been trained, and loved, and set out in life by old Broomlees, his uncle and guardian, and that Bell's lover had not only used his uncle with the basest ingratitude, but had appropriated to his own purposes money entrusted to him, and brought the old man into trouble. Some circumstances of dissipation and fickleness had not been wanting to increase the force of the picture. Andrew Carr, entirely convinced, had forbidden Bell ever to see the culprit, or let him know the reason of his dismissal. Her mother, wiser in her humility, would not yield implicit credit to the tale-bearer, and yet would not justify the accused. All that the good woman could do was to stroke with her kind hand that passionate young cheek, and "wait for Providence," as she said. But Bell was too young, too impatient, too hot-blooded to wait for Providence. She wrote a passionate,

appealing letter to Willie at sea, calling on him to come forward and clear himself. She denounced James Lowther with all the fiery vehemence of a woman and a Carr. Things came to a violent crisis, and threatened disruption of all the peace and union of the household. Day by day poor Bell, with dry eyes burning with anxiety, looked for Willie's letter; day by day her father stalked about his little farm, with outbursts of impatient wrath and indignation against the drooping girl; day by day her mother soothed her compassionately, looked on and prayed, and said nothing; and night by night James Lowther disturbed the household with his hateful presence, and sought the heart in its rebound—that changeable female heart of which so many a song and story is told; but which was no more like the strong-beating, passionate, honest heart of Isabell Carr than midnight is like noon.

Such things could have been borne; but a harder agony followed the unexplainable mystery and anguish of Bell's life. Willie's letter did not come, Willie did not write—even more, did not return—never was heard of—disappeared totally into that blank, aching, dreadful darkness which every where encompasses the little bit of the world we see. If his ship had been lost, the dreadful secret might have been explained. But his ship was not lost: it arrived, and he arrived at that far foreign port—the very name of which, if you mentioned it, would still send a thrill of pain through Bell's vigorous frame. But there the darkness swallowed up the brave and candid sailor; what he had to say for himself, or, if he had nothing to say for himself, and the lie against which Bell struggled was true, nobody could tell. The anguish of that long expectation need not be told; the quiet years had swallowed it up and gone down upon it, leaving no trace. Bell went away when she could endure no longer, “to service,” to quench her heart, or get new life into it; in that primeval struggle with hard labour and outside facts, which is the best discipline for human creatures. She had fought her battle so far bravely; till now, at last, when she had come home.

But, to see before her very eyes that author of her calamity; to know that she had been sent for—not to fill her dead mother's place, nor from the impulse of a relenting heart, softened by sorrow—but to be wooed and carried home by this man, the object of all the resentment possible to woman, the cause of all her sufferings—Bell would have been more than a mere human daughter could she have borne it. Her breast swelled in a passion of grief, indignation, injured love, and injured pride. With a hysterical gasp it swelled, “as if it would burst.” These emotions, which rose so high in her own retirement, where no mother followed now to soften the tide of passion or cool the burning cheek, would never be disclosed to the light of day. All a Scotchwoman's jealous reticence—all the proud, shy, self-control of a country-girl, brought up in such a house as that of Whinnyrig, built strong barriers around to confine the flood within its source; but here, where no one could see,

the passionate bosom swelled, the wild hands clenched each other, the bitterness poured itself forth. There were gleams in the east of early dawn, and the atmosphere had lightened, with a gradual smile and clearing of outline, all outside, before sleep visited the eyes of Bell. Ere that time she had nerved herself, as best she could, for that prospect before her. These daily, nightly persecutions; the necessity of bearing with this man's presence; hearing him, seeing him, knowing why he came; even, perhaps, tolerating his suit, so far as being within the same apartment with him made it necessary—no wonder that it was with a sick impatience and disgust of everything, that Bell, at last, closed her wearied, hot eyes upon the dawning light.

"And he's sell't Lillie!" were the first words Bell said, as, hastily dressing herself, she looked out at her little window next morning, and saw Robert Brown's black cow already in the dewy field. The bitterness of this exclamation could only be understood by an Annandale girl, proudly conscious of one beautiful fair cow among the little group of black cattle so usual in Dumfriesshire. Amid all her more engrossing troubles, Bell could yet feel a pang for the loss of Lillie, her mother's favourite, the "grandest milker" in the whole parish. "It's just like a' the rest," she said to herself bitterly, as she went down stairs. And perhaps it did not give a more Christian gentleness to her feelings as she descended into the hard beginning of her unlovely life.

When the father and daughter met that morning, neither of them took any notice whatever of the scene of last night. In such primitive Scotch households, "good-night" and "good-morrow" are dispensed with from members of the same family. There were no morning salutations between Andrew Carr and his daughter. They took their homely breakfast together with little conversation. What talk there was, was about "the beasts," that subject on which an Annandale peasant is naturally eloquent. The old man had bethought himself that there was a calf of Lillie's in the byer, and condescended to conciliate Bell by this fact. And Bell, we are obliged to confess, though it may convey a depreciating impression of her character and mind, *was* conciliated and pleased to hear it. She went about her work more lightly in consequence. She patted the long-legged, foolish animal, called it "my bonnie woman," fed it out of her own hand—did everything an experienced country-woman could do to attract its youthful affections. She had a hard day's work before her, as always, and no time for thinking. Marget Brown, too, came up at an early hour from the cottage, and the two fell into close conversation, as became old friends. On the whole, Bell was not miserable. She was nothing in the world of a heroine. When she went out to the door and lingered a moment in her pretty country dress—that short gown and petticoat which has almost disappeared out of Scotland—and, putting up her hand to shelter her eyes, looked out upon the familiar landscape,—it was, indeed, the landscape she looked at, and not any

illusive picture in her own imagination; the low pastoral hills, not very far off, with all their different tinges of colour; the rich wooded line which betrayed towards the east the course of "the water;" the "peat-moss," on the other side of the little hillock, with its fantastic paths and deep cuttings, glimmering where the sun caught them with gleams of water—all this was fair and sweet to the accustomed eyes of Bell. And not less sweet was the hum that filled the atmosphere everywhere—an indefinite mist of sound, in which poultry, sheep, cattle, and men had all their distinct inarticulate strain, and which now and then the soft low of a cow or the sharp bark of a dog defined for an instant and made complete. When, at last, her own thoughts began to reflect themselves in that landscape, and Bell remembered that along that moorland road last night her unwelcome admirer had made his appearance, she dropped her hand from her eyes and turned back to her work—wiser in unconscious natural wisdom than many a great philosopher. Such indulgences of sentiment were not for the manager of Whinnyrig—not, at least, in good daylight and with work in hand to do.

"I dinna doubt ye'll mak a change—you ought at your time o' life, with a' the world before you," said Marget Brown; "it's no like me, hadden doun with wark and weans. Young folks dinna ken, as I say to Robbie mony's the day—dinna ken the half nor the quarter o' what's before them; no that I would envy you. Bell, my woman, ye'll have an awfu' handfu' of the auld man, if ye canna turn your heart to young Broomlees."

"If ye want to please me, Marget, ye'll never mention his name," said Bell, shortly.

"I'm sure it's nae pleasure to me," said Marget. "I canna say he ever took my fancy, yon lad—nae mair like some o' his kin—But whisht, whisht, we're no to speak o' that. The mistress, ye ken, she never would say one thing nor anither. She was aye for waiting upon Providence; she was aye a rael guid woman, as was seen on her at the last. But, Bell, if ye'll believe me, I dinna doubt she got mair light on some things at the hinder end."

Bell's face flushed with sudden excitement; she held out her hands in a wild appeal to her companion, and gasped an inarticulate inquiry which startled Marget.

"I'm no meaning anything to make ye look so white," cried Marget, "naething out o' the way. Bell, my woman! Bless me, no! Naething uncanny ever came to a saint like yon. But just when a' was maist ower, and me at the bedside—(and sair, sair vexed we were that ye couldna be sent for—but death aye seems sudden whenever he comes)—she held out her bit thin hands, and says she, 'Willie! bless ye, my man!' says she, 'ye'll make my bairn happy yet.' Bell! Eh my woman! I wouldna have tell't ye if I had thought ye would have ta'en't sae muckle to heart."

For poor Bell, as was but natural, had fallen into a passion of tears. When these were spent, however, the Scotch girl quickly recovered her composure. It was a wonderful relief to her heart to be at liberty to speak about her mother at all, and the two entered upon that sad engrossing subject with all the minutiae of recollection, and all the eagerness of inquiry which specially belongs to the death-bed. But when Marget had unburdened her heart of all her remembrances, she returned to her original starting-point.

"But, mind my words," said Marget, "Jamie Lowther o' Broomlees has grippit the auld man fast, Bell. He's gotten our maister in his toils, as I say to Robbie—some way or other he's gotten that influence on him a body daurna say a word. And, eh Bell, if ye canna turn your heart to young Broomlees—as indeed it's little to be expected—ye'll hae an awfu' handfu' o' the auld man!"

Bell heard this angury in silence; she knew it well enough without any warning. Just now she had her mother's gleam of death-bed wandering or insight—which was it?—to comfort her. There was no doubt on the subject in Bell's mind; she received these words as if they had come from Heaven—a sacredness more than earthly was about the utterance of the dying. It came to her like a ray of light in the surrounding darkness—she felt her heart buoyed up with an unexplainable exhilaration. If the influence waned, it was at least ineffable for the time.

That night Andrew Carr himself entered upon the same all-important subject. The two were alone together as before; but Bell was busy with her stockings from the beginning of the conversation, and that very fact helped to fortify and calm her.

"Bell," said her father, "it's my desire you should show some civility to Jamie Lowther. Ye ken what he comes here for as weel as me."

"He might ken better than to come here at a'," said Bell, with involuntary bitterness.

"That's no a manner to speak to me," said Andrew Carr; "I require ye, upon your obedience, to do what I'm telling ye. It's for you Jamie Lowther comes here, and I've promised him he's to get you."

"Faither!" cried Bell, with a start and cry of indignation.

"I'm speaking plain fac'," cried the irritated old man; "I'm in my ain house, where I've aye been king and priest. Providence gied me the charge ower you, and it's your business to obey."

"If it's to be ceevil, I'll be ceevil," said Bell, restraining herself with a great effort; "and I'm no unceevil," she added, in a lower voice.

"Hear to what I've got to say to you. I've chosen him for your man—I've promised you for a wife to him," said Andrew Carr; "ye're mine to dispose of baith by God's law and man's, and I tell ye I've gien Jamie Lowther my word."

"But, faither, ye ken it canna be," said Bell, holding her breath so strongly, to keep herself calm, that her words ended in a gasp.

"Wherefore canna it be? I've gien my word it *shall* be," said Andrew Carr.

"You're hard, but you're no *that* hard," cried poor Bell, always struggling after the meekness which was so difficult to her. "If I was young and free, I might bend my heart to your bidding, faither; but ye ken a' as weel as me. Let alane a' that's happened, and a' I blame Jamie Lowther for; let alane I count him for my enemy, though I wish him no ill; let alane a' thing but the ae thing—there's this still," said Bell, a sob escaping from her in the midst of her words, "I like anither lad better,—and oh, faither, faither! *you* ken that, and so does he."

"It makes nae difference," said the old man: "if ye can speak up in my face, and name that ne'er-do-weel that cares nothing for you, as is weel seen; if ye've nae shame like ither women, it's no my blame—I lay my command upon you, and this is what ye are to do."

"But I canna," said Bell; "onything else in the world—onything else in the world, if it was my life."

"I wonder what the better I wad be o' your life," said the old man, testily; "your life! Na; onything but the only thing that's wanted! I've made up my mind; tak Jamie Lowther, or never mair ca' yourself bairn o' mine."

"If I was to be cast out of the house this moment; if I was to die on the moor, and never more see the light of day; if I was to be swallowed up by the earth, like Dathan and Abiram," cried Bell—gradually rising in irrestrainable emotion, wringing her hands, yet facing him with a pale look of resolve—for she knew her father well enough to know that he could keep even such a promise—"I'll die if ye like, and welcome, but I'll no perjure my soul!"

The two faced each other for a moment, both resolute, daring all things. Then the old man turned his chair round to the fire. "I'll gie ye three days to think," said Andrew Carr.

Bell sank down on her seat trembling, yet restraining herself. Three days! and it was but yesterday, with thoughts so different, that she had come home!

ISABELL CARR.

A SCOTTISH STORY IN TWO PARTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MARGARET MAITLAND," &c. &c.

PART II.—CHAP. I.

THE three days passed in an agony of deliberation and self-counsel. Bell had no friend to go to for advice. The only woman near at hand whom she could have consulted was Marget, whose perplexed advices would have thrown little light on the subject; and Bell, the only child of her mother, had been too much accustomed to depend on that sole and closest counsellor to be able to turn to other aids when she was no longer at hand. Though a greater part of the inhabitants of the parish were Carrs, the household of Whinnyrig had no relatives nearer than distant cousins, and Andrew Carr was too ungenial and self-willed a man to have kept up any warm degree of friendship with the scattered branches of his race. Bell was alone in the kindly countryside, though every "neighbour" at kirk and market knew her, and hailed with friendly greetings the motherless young woman. She had to take counsel of her own heart as she went, active but silent—her presence no longer betraying itself, as it once did, in involuntary unconscious songs and laughter—about the little farmyard. She attended to "the beasts" and the house, made her father's dinner, and "suppered" her cows, and darned her stockings, with an ache in her heart and a throb of painful thought in her mind. Pondering over and over again, no light came over that dark matter. Bell's character was not without a capacity of sacrifice; but it did not occur to her to sacrifice her honest heart and true love to her father's arbitrary mandate. That was simply impossible to the straightforward imagination of the country girl. Willie might be forgetful—might be dead; she might never so much as hear his name again; but the casuistry of a romantic contract, by which a bride of higher education and more refined habits of thought might have been beguiled—the idea of confiding to her future husband the fact that she had no heart to give him, or of resigning herself to his love for her father's sake, was out of the question to her plain, simple understanding. Jamie Lowther would have comprehended no such compact—Jamie Lowther, indifferent to any refinement of affection, yet bitterly jealous of preference, would under such circumstances have savagely married, loved, hated and cursed her, with a sullen consciousness of injury amid his selfish passion; and Bell would have felt herself no delicate martyr, but a perjured soul—a woman self-soiled and desecrated. Such was the plain aspect matters took to her unsophisticated mind. To adopt this revolting expedient never once occurred to her. Nothing, not even filial duty, could excuse or justify such a falsehood. Bell's thoughts indeed could scarcely be called deliberations. She pondered painfully what she should do in the event of being turned from her father's door.

She never even accepted as possible the idea that she might change her mind in respect to her unwelcome lover, or be induced to marry one man while her heart was occupied with another. That piece of wrong-doing, so often justified and called by dainty names, was inconceivable and impossible to Bell.

But the three days passed, and Andrew Carr still asked no more questions of his daughter. They took their meals together with very little conversation. Simple domestic references now and then, communications about the milk and butter, served as a thread of human intercourse to make their life tolerable; but conversation, which is always soant in their class, was next to unknown, except in moments of passion or elevated feeling, in the silent house of the Dumfriesshire farmer. This peculiarity, the result in the present as in many other cases of a higher tone of mind than usual, and a fastidious reserve in the expression of sentiment which is almost peculiar to the Scotch character, made it more difficult to enter upon subjects of interest beyond the every-day routine, and was an absolute protection to Bell in her loneliness. She knew, and her father knew, that when that matter was returned to and the ice once broken, the very excess of reserve in both their minds would overthrow all ordinary boundaries, and no compromise be possible. And perhaps the old man, when he had once expressed what was in his mind, was glad to leave the matter, and suffer time to work what persuasion or force might not accomplish. At all events, he did not hold to his word so far as this limit of time was concerned. The subject was tacitly dropped, though never forgotten. Both were involuntarily aware that neither had changed, and that when the inevitable moment came a final struggle must ensue:—but, with some touch of natural feeling or tenderness unusual to his character, Andrew Carr deferred that hour. He sat in his arm-chair within the glow of the red peat-fire through the long summer evenings—sat and talked slowly at intervals with James Lowther, who frequented the place almost as regularly as the evening came, and whom Bell, seated by the window, mending or making, with the dark moss gleaming before her into the wistful distance, and all the changing glories of the summer-evening sky above, steadily refused to notice. They were a singular group, all self-concentrated and individualized by the wonderful reserve which enveloped them, and by the passions which lay hidden, yet not imperceptible, behind that veil. Of the three, Bell suffered most, in the tedious and galling restraint to which she was subjected. The very vivacity of her feminine perceptions told against her in contrast with the steadier persistence of her companions. She was ready to have flung up her weapons and fled from the field with womanish impatience, while they stood obstinately to their point, secure of overcoming her. In the silence of the homely room, all reddened with the glow of the peat-fire, yet with the calm, cool evening light coming sweetly in through the uncurtained window, a close observer might have heard, through the tedious dropping

talk, the loud heart-beats of the humble heroine, whose female temper and constancy were being tried to desperation, and to whom the very presence of this lover, not to speak of his lowering, fiery looks of love and resentment, was intolerable. But Bell could not help herself—could not run away, as her impulse was, from that stake. The want of “a woman-body about the house” had made itself pathetically apparent to Bell in various ways since her return. Her homely practical eyes saw, as clearly as if but cattle and housewifery had been before them, that the lonely household could not go on long under the old man’s stern but failing sway, and that his speculations and his parsimonies had become alike wayward and uncertain, and would soon wear out, if they had not already worn out, the slender substance painfully gathered through a toiling lifetime, which Bell did not contemplate with the eyes of a possible heiress, but with the more keen and painful gaze of a poor man’s daughter, anxiously concerned lest there should not always be enough to satisfy all claims. This new fear, first suggested by Marget Brown, rejected, reconsidered, trembled over for many an hour since, added an additional pang of pain and uncertainty to all Bell’s embarrassments. She watched the tone of James Lowther’s address to her father—the manner of Andrew Carr’s response. Dread pictures of dismal rural bankruptcy arose upon her troubled mind. She would not leave the old man, whatever she might suffer. So she sat, agitated but silent, often roused to the wildest impatience, yet always restraining herself—perceiving with intolerable indignation and offence that her suitor began to take courage, and to look upon her with a certain satisfied glance of ownership, and that both her father and he were confident in their power of overcoming her opposition. She perceived all this, and did not take it meekly, patience not being a prominent quality in this young woman’s character; but at the same time it is not to be denied that her heart and strength rallied to the struggle with a certain rising flush of resistance and pugnacity. She retreated into dreams and visions, as she sat by the clear wistful window, with all the evening light glimmering and changing outside—not visions such as she had once indulged in, of the absent sailor coming, indignant in all the force of truth and virtue, to clear his reputation and claim his bride. Such dreams had long proved themselves vain. Bell closed her lips tight when Willie’s never-spoken name came to them involuntarily in irrestrainable appeals from her heart, and turned aside to cogitate painful plans of household thrift and labour, of butter-making, and all the uses of the “milkness,” which had not been put to full profit in past days. If her father was indeed in the power of Jamie Lowther, what a triumph to set him clear of those toils, and restore that independence which was life and breath to the stern old man! With a certain stern satisfaction, which proved her share in her father’s temper, Bell betook herself to labour through the day and plans by night. They might turn her evening rest into a species of torture for her high spirit and lively temper—they might

take what little comfort there was in it out of her toilsome courageous life, but they could neither overcome Bell's resolution nor drive her from her post. In this indomitable spirit she hardened herself against the perpetual persecution; and it was thus, in an activity that admitted little leisure, and with a firmness which knew no wavering, that the summer passed away.

CHAPTER II.

"THE auld man's weel eneuch," said James Lowther, in his deep voice, with his head bent, and his eyes gleaming up from under his heavy eyebrows. "He's—— Weel, he's *your* faither, Bell. Maist women would gie a man a blink of kindness for pleasuring their kin—but there's nae pleasing you. I dinna gang a' the gate to Whinnyrig, night after night, for a twa-handed crack wi' Andrew Carr. A' the parish kens that, if you dinna; and if I am never to get word or look o' you——"

"Ye never shall, and that ye ken—mair than what's ceevil," cried Bell, the words bursting from her in spite of herself.

"Ceevil!" cried the baffled lover, with a muttered oath: "if I sought ceevility I could gang other places; there's leddies in this countryside, though ye mayna think it, that wouldna object to Broomlees—but a man canna resist his fortune. It's you I want, though you're but a servant lass, and your faither a ruined man—and it's you I'll have, for a' your ceevility and uncee vility, whether you will or no. So, Bell, it's nae use struggling; it's far mair suitable for me and better for you to make up your mind."

"Never! if it was my last breath!" cried Bell, with all the intensity of passion.

The two stood in the midst of the calmest Sabbatical landscape; distant chimes of church-bells in the air, and all the hushed tranquillity of an autumn afternoon—a Sunday afternoon—the crown of dreamy, meditative quiet—brooding over the scene. They were on the borders of the moor, on a by-road which wound through an old plantation towards the kirk-going path. Bell had been on her way to church when her solitude was suddenly intruded upon by her desperate lover. She stood now arrested—half by his presence, half by the long shoots of brambles which encumbered the way and caught at her black dress. As she confronted him, indignant and determined, she occupied herself, with a certain scornful indifference to him in the midst of her displeasure which did not fail to strike the disconcerted wooer, in freeing herself from the brambles. The motion was trifling in itself, but it exasperated Lowther. His love and rage boiled over in a sudden explosion—

"Eh, woman! if I didna like ye ower weel for ony man's comfort, I would hate ye like murder!" cried Jamie. "To see you standing there dauring me, with your hands among the bramble-bushes, and no condescending so muckle as a glance to see the mischief you and the likes of

you can do in a man's heart! But I wouldna bid ye gang ower far!" said the baffled lover, lifting his thundery eyebrows to emit a glare of passionate light out of eyes full of mingled fondness and fury. "I'm in that condition, with a' I've come through, that I'm as like to do ye an injury as a pleasure. Nicht after nicht ye've seen me sit, and never spent a word on me. I'm no as patient as Job, and he never was in love with a thrawart lass that I ever heard o'. It's best for yourself, if you kent a', that ye dinna drive a man ower far."

"A woman may be driven ower far as weel as a man," answered Bell indignantly; "I want naething to say to you, Jamie Lowther; I'm just a servant lass as you say, and nae match for a grand gentleman like young Broomlees. I ask nae service at your hands but just to let me be—and as for injury——"

"I would take time to think ower that!" cried the exasperated lover; "there's no anither fool in the countryside would let you off as I do. Here am I, that might be maister and mair, coming about Whinnyrig like a ploughman lad, with my hat in my hand, aye looking for a pleasant word, when I might turn ye a' to the door, and take the bread out o' your mouths, and bring ye to your knees, Bell Carr—ay, and will, if ye dinna mend."

Bell lifted her eyes steadily upon him, growing pale, but not wavering. "Maybe ye ken what you mean yoursel'," she said, with a subdued but defiant voice; "it's past my finding out. I never yet heard that love and ill-will could live thegither; and as for bringing me to my knees, ye'll do mony a greater thing, Jamie Lowther, before ye'll do that!"

"If you kent what I can do, you would take mony a thought before you daured me to it," said Lowther, fiercely. "I can do you and yours mair mischief than a' your friends can mend."

"Dinna speak to me!" cried Bell, roused entirely beyond her self-control. "Do I no ken what you can do already? You can slander an honest lad and break an innocent lassie's heart. You can send them away ower land and seas that you're no worthy to be named beside. Ye can make them desolate that never harmed nor minted harm at you. You've done your warst lang, lang ere now, Jamie Lowther, and what you can do mair is as little matter to me as this bram'le thorn. Say or do as you like, the warst's done; and those that have borne the warst are free of fear. Since you've made me ower late for the kirk, I'm gaun hame."

Saying which, Bell turned majestically back, and threaded her way firmly and swiftly through the narrow paths, all slippery with the spiky leaflets of fir which lay in heaps, the growth of successive years. Prepared to oppose her onward progress, Lowther was quite disconcerted by this sudden return. He stood gazing after her with a blank look of mortification and disappointment, taken by surprise—then made a few hurried steps in pursuit—then paused, thinking better of it. He watched till her figure, elastic yet substantial, had reached the rising slope which

led to Whinnyrig. Then he turned back, and went away in the opposite direction, with troubled looks and a heart ill at ease. He could not defend himself from those continued rebuffs by the simple but difficult expedient of withdrawing his unwelcome attentions, and leaving the unwilling object of his affections at rest. He would make her as uneasy as himself, and destroy her peace, as she had destroyed his. That was the only expedient which occurred to him; and, secure of having increased Bell's unhappiness, however little he might have lightened his own, he went home, gloomily pondering extreme measures; but only to return, when the early autumn twilight fell, to linger about the open door from which the fire-light shone, to be asked in as usual by Andrew Carr's gruff voice—to sit in sight of that silent figure, in every movement of which he could trace a swell of indignation and resentment not yet calmed down—to find even the ordinary "good-night" denied him when he went lingeringly away, and to spend hours in the darkness, framing the plans of his revenge—that revenge which was at once to punish and subdue the object of all his thoughts—to bring Bell Carr to her knees and to his heart.

For, with the inconsiderateness of passion, Lowther did not perceive how unlikely these two results were, and how unaccordant with each other. He had a certain power over the fortunes of this defiant, resisting girl. He did not concern himself with any unnecessary metaphysics concerning the effect of a father's ruin upon his daughter's heart. He was not seeking her heart; he wanted herself—however, he could have her, whether she would or not, as he himself expressed it. When the little household was desolate and friendless, then Bell would be but too glad to marry him, he concluded, with a common coarseness not confined to any one class of men. He pondered how he was to do it with a fierce satisfaction. He loved her, yet he would not spare her a single sting of the punishment he had in store. He cursed her at the height of his passion, and vowed she should suffer for all her freaks and haughtiness. But in the midst of all his schemes of revengeful love, that strange element of ignorance ran through the elaborate but abortive scheme. He knew nothing of the creature he pursued with such unrelenting fondness. The idea of her standing at bay, refusing to yield, despising him the more for his power and the use he made of it, did not enter into his comprehension. He laid all his plans on a small scale, as any tyrant might have laid them on a great scale—calculating everything with the utmost nicety except the one thing which by a touch could upset all other calculations—that human heart, wonderfulest agency, which will answer to no abstract rule, but has to be considered through complex shades of individuality, incomprehensible to lovers as to kings.

CHAPTER III.

It may be supposed that this Sabbath evening contained little comfort for poor Bell, in the seclusion of her chamber and of her heart. When

the evening prayers were over, and her father had gone to his early rest, Bell, glad yet terrified to be alone, stood by her own little attic window and leaned out to court the night breeze which sighed round the homely house. There was no moon visible, but the subdued lightness in the air told that somewhere in the clouded firmament that hidden light was shining, and the wind sighed out pathetic admonitions of the coming rain. Bell leant out, looking sadly upon the familiar landscape—the long stretch of the moon falling blank into the darkness, the trees of the little plantation in which that interview had taken place bending and swaying in the breeze; the little cottage of Robert Brown, all shut up and silent in the early conclusion of the day of rest—all the children safe asleep, and the laborious pair making up the waste and toil of the week in the additional repose which crowned with an external benediction the spiritual quiet of the weekly holiday; and, above the stillness of the cottage, the dark farmhouse all shut up and silent too, so far as appeared, with those wistful young eyes gazing out into the darkness upon that indefinite cloud of ruin which drew nearer and nearer—ruin hard to be understood or identified, yet coming with a slow inevitable progress. Bell's heart beat loud in her troubled breast. That unformed shadowy presence darkly approaching roused mingled terrors and resistance and an overwhelming excitement in her mind. It seemed impossible to go quietly to rest and rise quietly to labour while every hour brought ruin and shame nearer to the devoted house. What if one sat and watched and forestalled its coming, presenting always a dumb front of defiance to the misfortune which should crush neither heart nor spirit! Alas! it might crush neither spirit nor heart in her own young indomitable bosom; but what of the old man, struck to the soul in that profound pride of his—the only passion which had outlived all the dulling influences of age! Bell shuddered, and withdrew from the thought as it came before her. She clasped her hands tight, and drew a long, sighing breath. She thought of the cows taken from the byer and the sheep from the hill—of Robert Brown's cart, with his furniture and his children, going sadly down the brae, and all the household gods of Whinnyrig turned outside to the cold daylight and pitiless eyes of country purchasers. The shame of it was quite enough to wring the heart of the country girl on her own account; but *she* could go forth erect and undaunted, too young and brave to be overcome even by such a misfortune. It was hard, but not fatal to Bell. She turned from her own view of the matter with a mournful outbreak of love, and awe, and pity. "The auld man! oh, the auld man!" cried Bell to herself, wringing her hands in an agony. Would he die of it, in the passionate despair of sublimated pride and poverty? Would he live heartbroken—shamed, in the dismal woe of old age? Once more Bell wrung her hands. It was too dreadful to speculate upon. She turned away from that picture with a suppressed sob of excitement and terror. Andrew Carr had been a just man all his life—severe but just, wronging no man,

serving God after his fashion. Feeling the intolerableness of this misery, Bell caught with a sobbing panic at the protection of Heaven; though we all know how seldom Providence affords these miraculous protections—how often God, in the calm of that Divine composure which knows of better blessings than earthly in reserve for his servants, permits the heaviest downfalls; yet Nature always, true but shortsighted, makes her infallible appeal to that one sure hope—God will deliver! Bell bent her hot eyes into her hands and leaned against the rough edge of the thatch which, somehow, by the prick of natural contact, gave a certain ease to her thoughts. *There* was the only hope! Something might yet occur to prevent the approaching overthrow—Providence itself might interpose!

When Bell lifted her head, a pale gleam of light from the hidden moon was slanting with a mystic whiteness over the dark moor. In that track of light moved the figure of a man. She watched, with a certain wild thrill—half of curiosity, half of fright. Was it some wandering stranger merely, late out, unaware of the habitudes of the country, in the sacred calm of the Sabbath night? Was it Jamie Lowther, whom love and revenge forbade to rest? She watched, with her heart beating louder and louder. The figure drew nearer, with lingering, uncertain steps—disappeared in the plantation, while Bell stood breathless—came out again into the pale, luminous darkness, slowly ascending the brae. No dog barked nor creature stirred about Whinnyrig. Did these footsteps wake no sound in the still dim world that breathed about the lonely wayfarer? Oh, Heaven! it was not Jamie Lowther, with his fiery love and hate—it was no stranger belated on that moor. It was some one who knew the way, lingering at every familiar turn, casting wistful looks at every well-known bush and tree. Did that gait and step, which Bell, who could not breathe, watched in such an agony of recognition, belong to any living man?—the noiseless footsteps falling without sound or echo into the palpitating stillness! She stretched out her arms wildly, in an agony of joy and terror. If it was he, what did it matter to Bell whether it was spirit or man? But her parched lips could not form the agonized inquiry that rose to them. At that overpowering moment, when, had she but been strong enough, another breath would have brought her to speech of Willie, living or dead, Bell fell down upon the bare floor of her solitary room. She fell there with a sob that caught no ear in the silent house, and lay all insensible and out of reach, whatever happened, unwitting whether precious support of love had come to her in her extremity, or whether a wandering apparition had mocked her with a glimpse of the unseen. Dread helplessness of flesh and blood! She could not bear that unspeakable strain of emotion. Just upon that moment at which the sight might have become ineffable, the mortal creature's vision failed her. She fell, and lay blank, in utter unconsciousness, then wrestling with the dreadful fancies which herald returning life; when she

came to herself, deep darkness and stillness was over the external world—nothing moved, nothing appeared in the dewy, gloomy landscape—the very wind had sighed itself to sleep in the hush of the pastoral Sabbath. Bell gazed out of her window with strained eyes, unable to rouse herself from that trance of watching, for half the night. But she saw nothing, heard nothing;—only at length, when the vigil was over, the quiver of rising light in the east, the distant cock-crowing over the far country:—the night, wrapping all mysteries in its bosom of darkness, was over. The loud day, all busy and unthoughtful, had begun.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT day was to be an era in the life of Isabell Carr. Sleepless and excited, yet constrained to conceal her excitement in the calm ordinary garb of life, she went down to the common labour which seems so strangely unaccordant with the high climaxes of suffering and passion. The country girl, if she felt it irksome a little, saw nothing startling in the contrast. She went outside to the cows; she caressed the calf she was training; she talked about the common matters of the house to Marget, who came to help in some of the operations of the dairy. Even to Marget she did not venture to speak of the wonderful vision of last night. In her own heart the remembrance throbbed with a force which kept her pulse beating as if in a fever. So wonderfully did she feel the flood of the life-torrent in her veins, that, in the height of her health and unconscious vigour, Bell paused to lay her finger on her pulse and listen to the loud palpitation of her heart, with a wistful passing wonder whether she was going to be ill and die. That would be an unthought-of solution of the mystery; and why, indeed, was that Appearance sent, if not with some such end? She paused at the door as she came to and fro, and gazed at that spot where, last night—last night!—crown of life over which life paused, as if it could go no further. What was it that stood there in the silence? And Bell, who dared not ask, much less answer the question, turned away to her dairy-work, with a sigh that came echoing deep out of the depths of her heart.

Matters were going on thus—the work progressing, the heart throbbing, the solemn day swelling into noon—when Bell, looking out from the house door, saw another sight upon the path. Not the Appearance, whatever it was—only two figures, entirely familiar and unmysterious—Jamie Lowther, in his Sabbath dress, as if coming on weighty occasion, and her father, walking slowly, with his head bent and a certain air of dogged firmness in his aspect, by the young man's side. The sight of them advancing together at this unusual hour—the farmer from his fields, the lover at a time when no Annandale man dreams of making love—brought back all the early visions of the previous night to Bell; she stood still, and recollected herself, with a painful necessary effort. She put away from her mind all the mystic thrills with which that midnight apparition had filled

her. Now the crisis she had foreseen was coming. She went solemnly into the house, promising to her heart, which could not detach itself from those absorbing thoughts, that by and by they two should return together to that precious region of dreams; but in the meantime something had to be done. She stood at the door of the great kitchen, holding it open—though it was always open, and the motion was one of excitement and not of necessity—to let her father and his companion pass in. Then she took up her post at the window, standing there, with her face pale by thought and restrained feeling, and her wistful eyes seeking that landscape out of doors which had formed the background to the wonderful picture last night. In her abstracted eye and pre-occupied look, the least close observer might have read that something had happened to Bell—something that delivered her out of the extreme personal interest she had in this business about to be transacted. Her black dress was laid away along with her Sabbath-day leisure. She stood in her striped petticoat and pink short gown, with her apron tied round her firm, round waist, in all her rural beauty, vigour, and health, but with a mystic visionary shadow on her which neither of the spectators could comprehend. They looked at her, both, in the momentary pause. There she stood who could avert ruin and misery—who could, at no greater cost than that of heart and life, satisfy the young man's fierce love and console the old man's wounded pride. Young, and a woman, could she resist doing it? Life and Heart are so little against wild Love and Pride; and but for the two other invisible champions of Truth and Honesty on either side of her—not to speak of that spiritual visitant last night—Bell's heart might indeed have faltered and given way.

"Noo, Jamie Lowther, say out your say," said the old farmer of Whinnyrig; "you've brought me here in the mid hour of day to settle your affairs with Bell. I might have been better pleased, and so might the lass, if ye hadna askit my help. But we're a' here, and time runs on; say out what you have to say."

"It's awfu' easy speaking," said Lowther, with a little sullenness; "you say 'to settle my affairs with Bell.' I never yet askit an auld man's help to court a bonnie lass. It's my affairs with you I want to settle. You ken ye're in my power; I've waited lang, and got little ceevility frae ony here. A man's patience doesna last for ever. You maun either settle auld accounts with me, Andrew Carr, or ye maun look to be rouped out of Whinnyrig. I maun either have money or money's worth; dilly-dallying like this is no for me."

The old man raised up his head, which had been bent in despondent quietness, and gazed with wonder and half-comprehension on the excited speaker. At the first hearing he did not understand. No voice like this had addressed Andrew Carr in his own house for years.

"Bell!" said the father, with a strange wonder. It was an appeal to her—not to interpose to save him, but to interpret whether this insolent

address was real. He had quite well known and agreed in the tacit compact that his daughter's hand was to purchase his own deliverance from the power of his creditor; but such a statement of the original case startled and stung his proud spirit. It was nothing about Bell—it was a demand for the bond, the pound of flesh—an attempt to humiliate and force the reluctant daughter into payment of her father's debt. A certain heat came slowly upon his aged face. Lowther, totally unaware of the spirit he was rousing—bent solely upon his own plan—determined to bring Bell to her knees and humble her before he accepted her—proceeded to carry out his design in his own way.

"You're weel aware what I mean," he said. "If Bell disna ken, it's no my blame. Ye became caution for Thomas Brown at the bank, and I paid the siller when he ran away. Ye were behind-hand with the rent, and I made it up. Ye sell't your beasts badly because you would take nae advice, and I helpit to stock the byer again. If it's no a' true ye can contradict me. But I'm to get naething back in return—no a ceevil word—no a kind look out of a lass's e'e. If I'm no to have what I wanted I'll take what I can; and, Andrew Carr, I'm saying ye'll settle your affairs with me."

Bell's abstraction had yielded to the painful interest of this colloquy. With the colour warming on her cheek, and the wildest tumult in her heart, she turned from the speaker to the listener. She saw the gleams of passion in James Lowther's eyes—passion—love which was almost hatred—and trembled with a momentary womanish terror at the power he wielded. Then she turned her gaze upon her father. The old man had risen up from his chair: his face was red with a flush of unusual rage and energy; his grey eyes burned under their shaggy eyelashes. If he did not speak, it was rather because he had too much than too little to say. There was a momentary silence, Lowther having discharged his arrow. Then, with a quick, faltering step, Andrew Carr strode forward to his antagonist. He was trembling with rage and excitement—words would not come from his lips.

"Go—go forth of my door!" stammered the furious old man. "Gang forth, Sir, out of my house! Bell!—Whinnyrig is yours and mine at this moment. Turn him out of my door. Siller!—He shall have his siller, if I beg from house to house. Affairs!—Gang forth, I say to you, out of my door!"

He had clutched at Lowther's sleeve, and with the vehemence of age, dragged him out of his chair. It was no contemptible hand, though it was old. The younger man, startled and furious, vainly tried to shake off that passionate grasp. They struggled together for a moment—Bell, struck dumb by the encounter, not attempting to interfere. But the fiery energy of the insulted patriarch was no match for the steady resistance of his antagonist. Lowther planted his feet firm on the ground, extricated himself, and stood defiant. The two who had come in together

amicable and allied, confronted each other with mutual passion. Bell said nothing—scarcely breathed: the matter was taken out of her hands.

“It’s a’ true I’ve said,” said the creditor sullenly, “and I’ll no be turned out of the house where everything belongs to mysel’. There’s anither way to settle, if ye like; but I warn ye, Andrew Carr—”

“Gang out of my house!” shouted the indignant old man. “Will I sell him my ain flesh and blood, does the devil think? Ye shall have your siller. Gang out of my house, ye sneering Satan! Bell, call the lads: am I to be insulted on my ain hearthstane? Bell, I’m saying! Ay, Willie, Willie, ye’ve come in time! Turn him out o’ my doors!”

Some one else was in the darkened apartment. Bell could not see who, or how he came. She only perceived the large old frame totter, the darkening fall like a great tower, of the heavy figure. That paroxysm had been too much for the old man. Age had sapped the ancient strength, and Passion had completed the ruin. He fell, putting forth the feeble arm once so mighty, to thrust his cruel creditor out of his sight. His daughter could not tell what was happening in that moment of terror. While she raised his head and unloosed his handkerchief from his neck, Bell was only aware of an ineffable consolation that stole through her heart, and strengthened, even in their tremor, her hands and her soul. She heard a voice she had not heard for years. She felt a presence in the apartment, somehow pervading it, though she did not see him. What did it matter—spirit or man? She was rapt into regions above common reason. Life and Death—Love and Sorrow, standing close about her, transported the young woman out of ordinary fear and wonder. She could have believed those were spiritual hands that helped her with her burden: she was content to believe it. She asked no questions—felt no surprise. In the moment of her extremity he was there who had vowed to stand by her in all the chances of her life. He was standing by her, and her heart was strong.

CHAPTER V.

THE doctor had come and gone. The old man was speechless, but calm, half-slumbering, half-unconscious in his bed. Whether he would die or live no one could tell: most likely he was to die; for age is weak to contend with sudden disease and rapid passion. He lay in unlooked-for ruin, like an ancient tower, and the aspect of the homely farmhouse was suddenly changed from that of every-day labour to that absorbed pre-occupation which subordinates everything to the present sickness and coming death.

Bell had come into the kitchen, to prepare some necessary comfort, from the inner room where her father lay. She started with a violent tremor to see James Lowther still standing in the scene of that encounter and downfall. It was strange to see him there with that same atmosphere of fury, love, and passion about him, after *all that had happened*. Bell did not feel she was treading on common ground—the dead had come alive, and

the living had been stricken, that day. It was a solemn day, far separated from yesterday and all the past. And what did her disappointed lover here, looking just as he had looked in the common life?

"So!" he said, with a long breath, as she involuntarily paused before him, "you've gotten back your joe!"

"What did you say?" asked Bell; her mind too much lifted out of ordinary talk or thoughts to understand what he meant.

"You've gotten back your joe," said Lowther fiercely, "he's come hame like ither dyvours; and you think you can scorn me safely noo. But I tell you it's a' Willie can do to look after himsel'—and as for you and the auld man, if ye gang on your knees to me I'll no alter noo. I'll take the bed from under him afore I'll let ye triumph over me. The auld man's bankrupt, as I warned ye yestreen. Ye can leave him on the parish and gang off with your joe, for ye'll get neither charity nor help frae me."

"Jamie!" cried a voice of warning from the door.

And Bell lifted her eyes. There he stood—the Appearance of last night—no apparition nor spirit—glowing with indignation, love, and succour. She gave a cry such as never had escaped her in all her anguish, and covered her face with her hands. She did not even say his name. She did not care to ask a question. The cloud floated away from her heart with all its mystic consolations. Willie was there! That was consolation enough. She did not pause longer, but went away to her sick room and her filial service. No dallying—no indulgence, however lawful, was becoming at that moment. She went with a light foot, restored to reality, serene and hopeful. Willie was there—explanations might come afterwards; light had come back to her eyes and confidence to her heart.

"She gangs to her duty without a question," said the stranger, with loving admiration. "Jamie, there's nae place for you in this house of trouble. I'm here! Ye've slandered me, but that I'll forgive ye. Ye've deceived me about her, and that I canna forgie myself that should have kenned better; but if there's a heart of flesh in ye, gang out of this house!"

"No till the house is roupit, and the haill stock o' ye ruined!" cried Lowther with a furious oath.

The sailor said no more. He seized his cousin by the arm, compressing it unawares in his passionate grasp. The two might have struggled into bloodshed before they were aware, with so much injury on one side, and so much guilt and jealousy on the other. But, as they stood eyeing each other, the inner door opened again, and a sight appeared that made them drop asunder, gazing with speechless wonder and fear. It was Andrew Carr leaning on his daughter's arm—tottering, yet upright, with bloodless face, and large bright eyes flickering in their sockets. With one arm he held Bell—the other hung useless, with its large hand pallid as death though all the browning of toil. Those eyes, which gazed but saw nothing—those shuffling, helpless feet—that large, old, tottering, broken

figure impressed the young man like the very presence of Death. He went forward blindly, half supported by Bell—half dragging her on. “Lads, it’s the Sabbath night, and time to gang a’ to your beds. Fare ye weel—fare ye weel! Gang on before for its mirk-night—I’ll but gie ae look to the stars, and then to my rest,” said the voice of the dying man. Nobody could disobey those words. The young men stole out before him, not venturing to look at each other. He went blindly to the door, feebler and feebler, and sank on the stone-bench outside, dragging his terrified daughter with him. Then he lifted his sightless eyes to the sky, which shone in the full glory of day. “Dark—dark—but the moon’s near her rising; and your mither’s lang o’ coming, Bell,” said Andrew Carr. His great grey head drooped down upon his breast; and while the young hearts palpitated and the young breath went and came, and those three figures round him had scarcely counted out other three seconds of their full existence, the life was ended and the spirit gone!

Quiet fell after that upon the house of Whinnyrig. The death-dwelling was saved. But when it came to be known how the old man met his death, James Lowther, of Broomlees, found few smiles and fewer friends in the indignant countryside. That picturesque figure of the old farmer, severe and morose while he lived, detached itself in a kind of tragic splendour from the surrounding landscape when he was gone—and in the mournful regard which reverted to him at last, people bethought themselves remorsefully of the young sailor condemned unheard. When Willie Lowther’s story was told, his cousin’s place in popular estimation sank still further. It was Broomlees and not Whinnyrig finally that was “rou-pit,” not for poverty, but for disgust and warfare with all the world. Bell’s disappointed lover, who had lied, and schemed, and almost murdered for her sake, went sullenly off to Australia, a broken man. Her sailor’s story was heard with tears, and volunteered excuses for his long silence and despair. He had missed Bell’s letter, till, returning to the Naval Hospital, where he had lain ill for months, he found it yellow and worn waiting him, contradicting his cousin’s evil report and calling him home.

“And was it you that came out of the moonlight that Sabbath night, or was it an Appearance out of heaven?” said Bell. “I feared no man more—I kent it was the Lord himself that sent deliverance. But Willie, it wasna you?”

“It was me and Death,” said the sailor. “He would never have yielded to own me till death was upon him. We came together to your father’s door.”

“God forgive me!—if it was death to him it was life to me—two angels!” said Bell, with tears. The tears fell in a gush of mournful tenderness on the old man’s grave: but brightened with involuntary rainbow gleams in the eyes of the recovered sailor’s bride.